

Becoming a movement



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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

Because of those who came before,
we are;
in spite of their failings, we believe;
because of, and in spite of the horizons of their vision,
we, too, dream.

Let us go remembering to praise,
to live in the moment
to love mightily
to bow to the mystery.

— Barbara Pescan

Rivington Pilgrimage

Another successful year

By Dennis Crompton

The Great Barn interior had taken on a new look: subdued lighting with tasteful decoration which the 115 Unitarians found congenial as they listened to Dot Hewedine propose the toast to 'Civil and Religious Liberty'. Her speech had been well-researched and was well-delivered, as befitted a distinguished Unitarian and member of the Executive Committee. Her survey of pilgrimages included pagan pilgrims to the deities of wind and water as well as Christians in more recent times on their journeys toward spiritual enlightenment.

Such journeys have never been easy but our present economic plight had not helped. Chapel-goers to recognise the need to divert more of their money from material things to the maintaining of the very chapels where our spiritual journeys are to be encouraged.

A neat neo-Aesop fable illustrated the dilemma: a 50p piece was in conversation with a £5 pound note. The £5 note said that he had been busily doing the lottery, holidays abroad, restaurants and that sort of thing. "And where have you been these days?" "Oh," replied the 50p, "the same old thing – chapel, chapel, chapel..."

Dot reminded us that the liberties we enjoyed were still far from being shared with less fortunate countries and that we should continue to support movements that promoted those liberties.

The actual pilgrimage walk from the Barn was led by the presiding Chairman Vince McCully who held aloft the Rivington banner and we were played on our way by 'One Accord' with joyful music that attracted many visitors whose interest was rewarded with Unitarian book-marks, a happy thought prompted by Stephen Lingwood.

In a packed chapel, the theme of the service led by Joyce Ashworth was that we should not look to organisations to solve our problems of falling numbers, but rather to take upon ourselves the role of ministry not only to our congregations but to the wider world. Stephen Lingwood's address 'Share the light within' developed this theme. No amount of glossy brochures would further the movement or progress of the Unitarians. This could only be achieved by presenting to the outside world the reality of a caring, cheerful outgoing community ready to share their inner light. It was fortuitous that the austere Rivington chapel did not have the stained-glass but had instead clear windows that looked out into the world beyond. This was surely the metaphor for the vision that he wanted to share.

The two interludes by 'One Accord' were also much acclaimed especially for the relevance of their words.

In all, the 2009 Pilgrimage had been well attended; the meal good; the toast challenging and the service uplifting. What more could we have asked?

Dennis Crompton is a member of the Rivington congregation.

A movement on a pilgrimage into the world.



Illustration created from a photograph of the 'Rivington Pilgrimage' by John Hewerdine

Time to get out of the burning barn

By Stephen Lingwood

This is the way I remember it: it was Saint George's Day 2001, an unusually sunny April day, and I was sitting in Centenary Square in Birmingham. It was the Easter holidays of my first year at the University of Birmingham, studying geology.

I was sitting on a bench next to a bubbling fountain, enjoying the cool sunshine and reading a book. The book was 'A History of God' by Karen Armstrong. It was the best book I had ever read on religion. I think it still is the best book I've ever read on religion, even after four years of studying theology full time.

I reached the chapter on the Reformation – that diverse and influential set of reform movements that erupted in Western Christendom in the 16th century. I came to a couple of paragraphs – maybe half a page at most – that described one of those reform movements. From memory it said something like, 'There were also reformers called 'Unitarians' who were led by Faustus Socinus in Poland. These Unitarians taught you could follow the religion of Jesus without believing in his unique deity and atoning death on the cross.'

I read and reread those few paragraphs. 'This is what I've always believed,' I thought, 'But I thought I was the only one.' I was a lone heretic who had come to conclusions that had excluded me from my religious community of birth, and I was unsure whether I would ever fit into a religious community again, or if I wanted to. I was a lonely spiritual seeker, with little hope there was a religion for me. But here was a name for what I believed: Unitarianism. I was not the only one. There was a community for me.

Or was there? The book only mentioned Unitarianism as an

historic movement over 400 years ago. As far as I knew this was a short-lived movement limited to Eastern Europe. As far as I knew Unitarianism had been dead for centuries (as indeed it has been in Poland). As far as I knew Unitarianism did not exist at this time, in this country.

Either way I wrote down the word 'Unitarian' in a notebook and resolved to look it up when I got home. I did look up the word on the internet and discovered that Unitarianism did exist, at this time, in this country. In fact there was a Unitarian church not five minutes' walk away from that very spot where I sat in Birmingham. A few months later I visited that church, Unitarian New Meeting, and the rest, as they say, is history.

But the question that confronts me now, the question that confront us, is: if the same thing happens in 20 years' time, will the next spiritual seeker be as lucky as me? In 20 years if some other lonely heretic reads the word 'Unitarian' in a book, or on a website, will they be able to find a living Unitarian community in the town where they live? In 20 years will there be a Unitarian community left, or will a spiritual seeker discover that this faith no longer exists at this time, in this country? Will they discover that Unitarianism was swept away, not by religious persecution as in Poland, but by the dramatic social changes of the 20th and 21st centuries, with which it was unable to keep up?

The scale of our situation hit me a few years later when I was studying at Boston University School of Theology. I was speaking with a fellow international student who was from Korea. Christianity has flourished in South Korea and today it is the most Christian of all Asian nations. This Korean student

(Continued on next page)

Give account of the hope within

(Continued from previous page)

was talking about his home church, and he said that his church had 6000 members. That's *one* congregation with 6000 members. It was a huge realisation that his one congregation had more members than my entire denomination.

The first letter of Peter, in the Christian scriptures advises, 'always be prepared to give an account of the hope that is within you.' As a Unitarian minister in my 20s, I feel eyes looking at me to give an account of the hope that is within me. As someone who has given his life, his career, his vocation to serving this community, do I believe that a community will still exist to be served at the end of my career in 40 years' time?

Yet hope is within me, despite all the evidence to the contrary, hope is within me.

I am told this is a true story. There was once a barn full of turkeys, which one night caught alight. The turkeys huddled together in a corner of the burning barn, until the farmer rushed in and opened wide the barn doors to let the turkeys out. But the turkeys stubbornly stayed huddled in the corner. The farmer had to enter the barn and shoo the turkeys out, but once outside the turkeys circled the perimeter of the barn until they found a hole in the wall. Then they went straight back in to the barn's familiar confines.¹

The outside world was too scary, too unfamiliar, too much outside their comfort zone. And so those turkeys preferred the familiarity of the barn to the world outside, even when the barn was burning down.

Maybe our barns are burning down. Maybe that's a good reason to step outside them.

Our culture is undergoing huge changes. The last vestiges of that alliance of church, state and culture we call Christendom will soon be swept away. The old patterns of churchgoing are dying, and we feel their death. We feel the heat of the fire around us. The burning of those patterns of church that served us for centuries. Yet I have hope within me.

Because maybe it's time to step out of the barn into the cool night air of this new century.

Maybe it's time to let some things burn. Maybe it's time to remember that a good number of our congregations began in the 17th century when people were brave enough to leave the familiar confines of the Church of England and worship as a new people in

fields or homes or, indeed, barns. Metaphorically, and literally, we need to step outside our church structures.

People in this century will not understand the Christian story, and Christian culture as a natural background to their lives. People no longer know hymns, people no longer know the Lord's Prayer (yet some churches still insist on saying this prayer without it written down anywhere, assuming people do know it). People no longer understand very much about churches and Christianity. It's entirely alien to them. We are moving into the brave new world of post-Christendom, and no one quite knows what that will look like yet.

And by the way, America is not the place to look for answers on this. Americans, including Unitarian Universalists are, stuck much deeper into Christendom than we are. Despite a secular constitution, the United States is stuck pretty solidly in Christendom ways of thinking and acting. This may change in another 50 years, but it's clear that we will come to terms with post-Christendom before America does.

I see post-Christendom as a great opportunity. But we need to understand this new religious culture. We need to let Christendom assumptions and ways of working burn into embers and engage in the culture in a new way. We need to shift from a maintenance model of doing church to a missionary model of doing church.

For example in post-Christendom people will no longer come to us because of how we are different from mainstream Christianity. They will only come to us if we demonstrate how we are different from no religion at all. We will attract attention only if we can demonstrate something in our lives that is missing from the lives of non-religious people.

Visitors will come to us seeking one thing: a way of life worth living. They will come to us with questions such as: how can I lead a deeper spiritual life? How can I find deeper meaning in my life? And I am hopeful because I believe the Unitarian faith has the spiritual resources and flexibility to be able to answer these questions – and answer them well.

Potentially we offer a spiritual path that engages every part of the self: spirit and mind and body; a path that is both deeply mystical and also deeply engaged with the world through activism; a path rooted in a relationship with a living Spirit of Love present in every corner of our world.

But visitors will not seek the answers to their ques-

¹ Taken from Arthur Paul Boers, *Never Call them Jerks*, (The Alban Institute, 1999), 65.

And step into the cool night air

tions in shiny leaflets, but in the embodied truths of our lives. When they visit us, they will ask the question: do these people look like they love one another? Are these people living a life worth living? Are these people leading a deeper spiritual life? Are these people working for the transformation of the world? In this community, can I feel the tangible presence of God?

Our noble rhetoric will fall on deaf ears if our truths are not embodied. There is a story that a Catholic priest was once teaching a confirmation class. He asked the question, 'And by what sign will they know we are Christians?' And as often happens in a classroom situation he was met by deadly silence. So he asked the question again, and as he did so, he made the sign of the cross. But one woman in the class was not watching and raised her hand and said, tentatively, 'By how we love one another?' And the priest just managed to stop himself before he said, 'No, that's the wrong answer.'

Letting the barn burn, and stepping out into the cool night air will mean understanding it is not the barn that matters. What matters is us, not the structures that surround us. We think that we *go* to church to consume this product called 'religion,' just as we go to the cinema to consume the product of a film. But we do not *go* to church, we *are* the church: a pilgrim people called out for the purpose of the transformation of the world.

One of the reasons we fail to live up to our high ideals is that we do not take membership seriously enough. Our consumerist culture infects the church we expect a dedicated few to do our ministry for us.

We Unitarians stopped ordaining ministers some years ago. We do not have a rite of ordination when someone becomes a minister. Some would say perhaps we should. But what I would like us to do is ordain the laity. If our theology affirms the priesthood and prophethood of all members then becoming a member of a Unitarian congregation should be treated with the reverence and celebration of an ordination. Becoming a member should be considered an important and wonderful decision, because it represents a commitment to join in the great task of our religious communities in transforming the world. We should tell those who come to join our congregations 'You will be cared for here, but at some time you will be called upon to care for others.'

We think we employ ministers to serve congrega-

tions. We do not employ ministers to serve congregations; we employ ministers to lead congregations in serving the world. We do not employ ministers, or staff at Essex Hall, to do our social justice or our evangelism for us. Our General Assembly structures are not there to do our ministry for us, but to support and empower our congregations and communities in their ministry. The primary purpose of our national structures should be to support existing congregations and to plant new congregations. That's the primary way any denomination grows, by the way, by planting new congregations. When we start planting new congregations, then we'll be taking growth seriously.

Stepping out of the barn requires trust. It requires we no longer place our trust in the barn itself, the structures of our religious communities, as this is a misplaced trust, or in another word, idolatry.

Stepping out of the barn into post-Christendom requires a trust in something deeper, a trust that we are part of a force much greater than ourselves: that 'dynamic creative force whose beauty and complexity stretch from the majesty of the cosmos to the quantum workings of particles we can only see at third hand.'² It requires a trust in that depth of our reality that in moments of fear and trembling we dare to name as 'God.' And a trust that that Spirit of Life will not ask of us anything more than we are capable.

Stepping out of the burning barn will mean we truly become a word we sometimes use for ourselves – a 'movement.' A people going somewhere, not circling the wagons in fear. A movement on a pilgrimage into the world, not an institution afraid of going outside its own walls.

We can huddle in the corner of our burning barns, and maybe those barns will see some of us out, maybe those barns will see most of us out. Maybe it's not so bad in the barn, maybe there's lots of good things about the barn. But the barn is burning, and it will not last. And the only way any of us turkeys will be left in a few decades is if we step into the cool night air of the world outside, and make a difference to that world. The hope within me, is that we will.

This article is based on the address given at the Rivington Pilgrimage on 26 September by Stephen Lingwood, Unitarian minister at Bolton.

Respect all existence

By Jim McKenna

It was All Hallows' Eve ... Hallowe'en. Two years ago, on 31 October 2007, after 14 years of suffering severe and treatment-resistant schizophrenia, my 33 year-old daughter Aileen suffered cardiac arrest and died. At that moment, I was in a hall in Eaglesham – a few miles away – in which, normally, my mobile phone can neither receive nor make calls.

Mysteriously, my phone rang **that** night, and when my wife Agnes told me of the cardiac arrest I sped home to take her to the hospital where Aileen was an in-patient.

As she waited for me to arrive at the corner of our avenue Agnes, a long-time atheist, tells me that on **that** occasion she prayed that our daughter would not die. To whom or what she prayed ... she knows not, but pray she did. I **didn't** pray. Over the previous 14 years when I had been Aileen's principal 24-hour carer, with the result that I was unable to take up any meaningful paid employment so Agnes was the breadwinner. I had prayed and silently cried myself to sleep on many, many nights as Aileen in her bed next door did loud verbal battle with adversaries which only **she** could see and hear. I had prayed, to whom, or what I do not know, that Aileen would be cured of that hellish illness.

The thought came to me early on in that period of her illness that surely the millions who perished in Auschwitz had sent up prayers that they would be spared, and if there was a god he/she/it must be either deaf or heartless! After that realisation, my 'wee' problem of **my** only daughter didn't stand a chance. The praying stopped.

The nearest I have since come to 'prayer' was on the morning of the day Aileen died when I said to my wife 'I wish that God would just give me an illness so I could die without pain. I can take no more'.

Having no personal need of clergy I had not asked the then-minister at Glasgow Unitarian Church to conduct the funeral. I asked, instead, the assistance of three members of the congregation who conducted the service and readings. Among the hundreds attending the funeral were those of many faiths, and of none ... but they all brought with them sympathy and love and kindness to a bereaved family. We are **all** of the same species which perished **and** which murdered in Auschwitz and all the other terrible places. We **all** have the capacity to do good **and** evil but on most occasions, such as the day of that funeral, only good was present. It could be sensed in the atmosphere. The **human** capacity to do good prevailed ... it reigned on that day.

This is not written in any sense of self-pity or grief; indeed almost the opposite.

This is almost a celebration of the end of the period of indescribable sorrow, such as is known only by the bereaved. A natural process, a catharsis, a cleansing of a wound. This I believe: Knowing of the good of which humanity is capable, and also of the potential for evil, I am of the view that **all** existence ought to be acknowledged, and respected. I do not pretend to understand the concept of deity but I **do** believe that **all** in this universe is godly, holy. Even us. I think, therefore I am.

Jim McKenna is a member of the Glasgow congregation.

No one is always right, including me

By Gordon Jackson

At work, one colleague reminds me that I am never 100% about anything. This is true, as I always allow for the possibility that I could even be 1% wrong and this has saved me from embarrassment.

Of course it was through being embarrassed, numerous times, that I learnt to allow for the possibility that I could be wrong even when I felt I was 100% right. I am sure I am not so different from you, which means you have probably been in the same situation as I in the past where you insisted emphatically on something, totally convinced in your own mind only to find a time later that you were wrong.

Well my single principle of always allowing even 0.1% chance of error has saved me from being dogmatic. It also helps me avoid being too confrontational as usually I and the other party will go away and agree to check our facts. Of course, usually I am right (joke) but yes there are occasions I am wrong. This I believe: We should allow for the possibility of error.

Gordon Jackson lives in London Colney, Herts

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this

An enquir

By Geoff Levermore

When I was a child, I spake as a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass

When I was a child I was baptised. As I grew older, I pondered what original sin is not mentioned in the Bible, and how the Ten Commandments, are not broken in this universe. Indeed the New Testament, I believe, is about getting acceptance. However, as a Hindu in a Christian culture and I believe I know more about Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and striving to find the "summit".

Five years ago I discovered Unitarianism. I believe that many in the pews of churches, and in the minds inside a church, are enquiring.

I believe that, as I think Plato said, we should examine how I can live a good life. I believe that and that other religions, philosophies, are a test of our rationality. Now I am a little clearer, it is becoming a little clearer, I believe.

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stood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became

firmed in the Church of England. I believed what I was told.
believe as it did not all add up. Then I discovered that
is the Trinity. I believe that the laws of physics, as we know
ny miracles cannot be explained but might have a purpose.
embrace the miraculous nature of its time to progress and
first and an Englishman second, I have been brought up
useful framework for personal ethics. I also want to learn
theism as they are valuable frameworks as separate routes

rational religion. I am surprised it is so little known but I
es believe as we do and do not switch off their enquiring
ng one of our greatest blessings.
xamined life is not worth living. My religion is to help me ex-
t religion should advance as our understanding advances
and most knowledge can contribute to this, subjected to the
g put away childish things, I see through a glass darkly, but

Geoff Levermore is a member of Norcliffe Chapel, Styal.

God loves every sparrow

By Naomi Linnell

I stood on a hillside overlooking Doone Valley. I was 9 years old. It was the perfect day – bright clear sunlight, bird song, a slight breeze, the sort of day when all's well with the world and God is in his heaven. I stared across the tops of the trees far into the horizon, and for a split-second moment I lost everything – sunlight, breeze, bird song, and in that 'infinite moment' it seemed to me I glimpsed eternity. What this huge panorama of an immortal landscape so golden, so delicate, so strong, seemed to be showing me was my own insubstantial finite mortal self looking as if through an invisible window into a world both infinite and immortal, stunningly beautiful but, to a child, frighteningly powerful. Its essential loveliness was overwhelming, and so also was my sense of loss that I could not remain forever a part of this miraculous vision.

Over the years the experience has been repeated, but never with quite the same power, never with quite the same sense of awe as I knew then. I have come to look on these slivers of joy as times of spiritual revelation; not so much like that first Exmoor invisible window onto the otherness of eternity, but rather as the absorbing of the individual that is myself into both the greater wholeness of the natural world and into the immanent hand of God. With this blessed sense of absorption comes the perception, the belief that I must as best I can care for this world in which I live and its inhabitants amongst whom I live, and honour the God from whom ultimately all this world has come.

I have no formal Creed, but since the age of 9, I have looked on the natural world and all its inhabitants much as a girl looks on her first lover – exciting, beautiful, pristine, unmatched. I have heard God in the music of Mozart, I have recognised God in the greeting of a smiling stranger, I have seen God at work in the meticulous and generous care taken by our street cleaner. I have shied away from the ugliness of decay, been sickened by the stench of blood and the injured scream, and mourned for lives broken and wasted by cruelty and greed. Where, in these things, is the love and the presence of God? But as the shining beauty of the memory of the first love is never wholly lost, so I have never quite failed to find the reflection of God everywhere and in all things. A God who is omniscient, eternal and ineffable and yet a God who knows and loves each sparrow who falls to the ground – in this God do I believe.

Naomi Linnell is a member of the National Unitarian Fellowship.

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Write and submit your statement of personal belief.

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Be brief: 300-500 words

Name your belief

Be positive

Be personal

For more tips see: <http://thisibelieve.org/>

Send contributions to Inquirer@btinternet.com, or to the postal address on page 2.

The INQUIRER

This I Believe

Never, ever, sway when sermonising

By Kate Taylor

What a lot, in terms of aesthetic, emotional, intellectual and physical impact, a service can provide!

Participants at a lay people's training day at Luther King House, Manchester in July were invited by the Reverend Dr Ann Peart, then-principal of Unitarian College, Manchester, to analyse the elements of acts of worship that they had conducted. We had to consider the purpose of each item and how individuals might respond to it. In particular, she asked us to focus on both people who had come feeling happy and those who had come feeling sad.

What was striking was how dynamic the hymn sandwich can be and how, or at least we supposed, the depressed can be either cheered or confirmed in their misery and the happy can bounce through the hymns but become sombre during an address.

Discussion focused for a time on the episode – offered in some of our chapels – of lighting candles of concern. The problems were such that it was suggested that some stage-management might be needed. Other members of the congregation may not hear what someone in need of sympathy or congratulation has to say. How do you cope with the exposure of prejudice? What if so many people wish to light a candle and narrate their recent experiences that a good deal of time is taken up? What if someone wants to 'hold the floor'? Is the whole procedure for some people just a 'turn off'?

Ann drew attention to various models of the dynamics of worship and how a service can involve a psychological dying and rebirth: there might be a 'letting go' as the individual relinquishes immediate preoccupations and yields up concerns to God; there might be a 'reassembling' in turning again, strengthened, to face the world.

Do Unitarian services provide an opportunity for the individual to acknowledge weakness, failure and guilt, if only silently whilst following the words of a prayer, Ann asked.

More discussion considered the appropriate place in the 'programme' for chapel notices. Often the offertory is taken immediately after the address, with the notices following that. But doesn't this interrupt a phase in the service where quiet reflection, absorbing the challenging content of the sermon is important?

As the morning session closed, we listed positive and negative experiences that can occur during the hour of the service. And quickly found that 'one man's meat is another's poison'! Either we loved to have children running about, or were much



The Rev Dr Vernon Marshall and (seated l-r) The Rev Dr Ann Peart, Liz Shaw the administrator for the event, and Dawn Buckle who presided. Photo by Kate Taylor

irritated by them. Pop music on a CD might be a real delight or quite deadly. But there was clear shared objection to the use of male-dominated language, hymns that are set too high and inappropriate forms of physical contact.

During the afternoon, the Rev Dr Vernon Marshall discussed with us the content and dynamics of the address. He provided a wealth of suggestions for finding topics, on the style of the address and the manner of delivery. 'It is not a lecture,' he emphasised, 'and the skill of the preacher is different from that of the lecturer although both must make eye-contact with their hearers'. 'Gesture, but don't sway,' he said. (Swaying can be a distraction and can even unnerve!) He advised us to keep the language simple, to avoid acronyms and either to exclude or explain technical terms (epiphany, incarnation, karma, for example).

Vernon favoured introducing anecdotes perhaps especially about something experienced personally by the speaker. He advised us to be passionate rather than clever, to be sincere, saying what we believe not what we think others want to hear. We should vary the rhythm and the pace, and should allow pauses.

Characteristically an address moves from the secular to the spiritual, Vernon thought. A tidy design might have an opening, three clear sections, and a conclusion. The conclusion might be some words from a poem or a hymn. But all to be provided in 20 minutes at the most.

Briefly we wondered whether the address remains as important as it used to be. Briefly, too, we considered whether we are sufficiently sophisticated in our manner of presenting addresses when modern technology allows for the visual along with the verbal. Dawn Buckle presided over the event as chair of the General Assembly's Joined-up Education Panel.

Kate Taylor is a member of Westgate Chapel, Wakefield.



Workshop participants. Photo by Kate Taylor

More memories of 'Five Days Away'

By Elizabeth Rosenberg

This year's FDA had the most participants of all four years – 34. It was so big that we had 9 leaders! John Harley, Sarah Warhurst, James Barry, Claire Maddocks, Emma Lowe, Lorna Hill, Andrew Usher, Stephen Lingwood and Andrea Clark Ward. The theme of this week was 'Leadership Skills'.

In the first session, we talked about what qualities a leader should have. Then we thought about whether these were good or bad qualities. Then we had to think of a good leadership skill that we have, which is more difficult than you would think because, as Sarah says "We are very good at thinking of all the qualities that we would like, qualities we don't have. Our problem is that we do not think enough about all the fantastic qualities that do we have."

Credo Groups are small groups of people with two leaders and each night a different Credo Group leads the Circle Time. Circle Time is a winding-down time at the end of the day. You just chill really.

The next day was our day out, a full day of abseiling and mountain biking. The abseiling was awesome; they had two drops, a 65-foot one, and a 90-foot one. The bottom of the 65 foot is quite rocky and the bottom of the 90 foot is... a river! There is someone on the ground pulling you across so that you don't go in the river. It's so scary it's unbelievable, pretty lush scenery though.

That afternoon was the mountain biking which I hated. I couldn't get the bike going. The seats were like rock, and then my thumbs numbed out and I only felt those two days after the experience. Never again.

Wednesday we were all put into groups and we had to pick up a bamboo stick with each of us only putting one finger from each hand under the bamboo stick. I thought that it was utterly pointless and we were all tired from the day before activities and why? Why do that first thing in the morning?!

Later that day, we had the fourth leadership session of active listening. We had an inner circle of chairs and an outer circle of chairs. Then everybody had somebody facing them, so then Sarah gave us a topic to talk about to our partner e.g. your biggest achievement this year. You had to talk for two minutes and then the other person actively listened. Then you swapped around so you listen and they talked. I thought that it was fantastic just to have someone listening to you, because obviously, you talk to a lot of people but you don't actually think that they are listening.

After that was just saying good-bye and things; there was a few tears, but not too many and there was a couple of very good hugs. We did finally get home

though and I was happy to be home but nowhere is Hucklow it's where all my really good friends are, and hopefully making some new ones. If any of you are coming next year!

Elizabeth Rosenberg, 13, is a member of Nottage Chapel, Porthcawl, South Wales

By Isabelle Rosenberg

This August I found myself at Hucklow again. This time for my third FDA (Five Days Away). This year our theme for the week was 'building everyday leadership skills'. As always, we had games to start off with, such as the parachute game, to help us get to know each other. I thought that the theme of leadership was a good one. It was very helpful, especially as I don't consider myself as a natural leader!

The activities that we did were very interesting apart from in the morning when I was too tired from the late nights to fully participate!

On the second day of FDA we had an activity day. I have to say it was my least favourite part of the week. But it did get us out of the centre for the day. In the morning we went mountain biking. Some of the more sporty people (mainly the boys!) managed to go the whole 20 miles along the trail: a few of my friends even did an extra three miles! I didn't quite manage that! I did about 10 miles, and I thought my legs were going to fall off! I also couldn't sit on the floor for the rest of the day! In the afternoon, we went abseiling. It was AWFUL (in my opinion). I found it so scary, I cried and screamed all the way down, and I also started to have a small panic attack halfway down!

But I'm so thankful that my friends were there, for the whole way down the 35ft bridge they kept up a constant stream of encouragement, telling me how great I was doing when I really wasn't! I realized doing that abseil how much I really appreciate them being in my life. I didn't think that I would feel proud of myself for doing it. But now, much later, I am incredibly pleased that I did it.

In the evenings, we had our "circle time". This is our half hour at the end of the day when we are quite and sometimes do small activities. My favourite circle time was "pass the parcel". Inside each of the layers was a statement and we had to choose the person who best fitted the statement, give them the parcel and then they would pass it on. i.e. "most entertaining (which is what I had!)"

Next FDA will be hard, because six of my friends left this year. So next year I will be the second oldest there! The next time I will be in Hucklow will be in November for senior weekend! See you there!

Isabelle Rosenberg, 16 is a member of Nottage Chapel, Porthcawl South Wales



this I believe
Senior Weekend
Fri-Sun 6-8th Nov 2009
Nightingale Centre,
Great Hucklow
All 14-17 year olds welcome

art
credo
caring
sharing
chilling
walking
circle time
expression

e: info@unitarian.org.uk 4 more
inspired by www.thisibelieve.org

Letters to the Editor

GA website is vastly improved

To the Editor:

I would like to congratulate James Barry publicly on his splendid achievement; FINALLY Unitarians in Britain have a website they can be proud of! It's easy to navigate, informative and attractive. Well Done James.

Sue Woolley

Midland Unitarian Association

Don't waste time or money on a new name

To the Editor:

What's in our name?

Everything that needs to be there, that is the point of a name.

Alan Ruston's letter (prompted by the Resolution passed at the Annual Meetings) is just the first insertion of the thin edge of the wedge.

It is just the start of the latest attempt to drop "the C word". Attempts like this have happened from time to time over the years because apparently some Unitarians do not like to be associated with the word "Christian" in any way, and would be quite happy to throw our heritage onto the scrap heap.

This time the reason given is that our name is too long and too cumbersome. A likely story, who decides what is too long, (or too short for that matter)? Has a member of the EC been appointed as "Length Officer"? Have we now got a "Size Commission"? We need to know these things.

Some people seem to think that changing our name will bring an end to all our problems. Never mind about falling membership, ignore the fact that churches are closing, disregard the lack of ministers and forget that there is no real leadership from the EC. Instead of worrying about these problems, let's worry about changing our name! Yes, let's waste a lot of time and money on changing our name; that must be the right way to fix things. What nonsense! Perhaps a consultant can be brought in to help, that will waste a bit more of our limitless funds. If we must change our name how about "Unitarian and Free Christian Congregations" or, and here's a thought, "Free Christian and Unitarian Congregations"!!

Ken Howard

Warden, Stalybridge Unitarian Church

This movement is not sinking

To the Editor:

Cliff Reed (letter, *Inquirer*, 3 October) does well to remind us of Anna Letitia Barbauld. Certainly Anna was always in favour of some emotion and feeling in worship – especially when she was living in the rather academic Warrington Academy. Nevertheless her primary concern, especially later in life, was with the intellect. Her biographer, William McCarthy, in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* says that Anna shared the liberal Dissenters' view of the Methodists, for example, as 'wilfully anti-intellectual' and that 'she could no more have dispensed with intellect than she could have cut off her arm'.

Incidentally, Cliff's suggested name of 'Titanicarians' is only apt if we are sinking – but the fact is that we are not. Much more has been done throughout the country in the last few years than tinkering.

Peter B. Godfrey

Stonehouse, Glos.

Spirit-filled churches will be full churches

To the Editor:

I read with interest the letters from the Rev Cliff Reed and by Sara Wilcox (*Inquirer*, 3 October).

I heartily agree with Cliff Reed: tinkering with our name is going to do little to grow our movement. My own belief is that we will grow only by having well led, vibrant, spirit-filled local churches that people actually want to join.

The great tragedy of our movement is that we have bought into the idea that people would come flocking to our churches if only they had heard of us. I don't believe this to be totally true. My own experience is that when we offer something that meets the needs of people, they will find us, and it doesn't make any difference what the 'name' is. Sara Wilcox asserts that "most people have mainly negative associations with Christianity", basing this on her own experience. I have to say that my own experience cannot be more different. As a minister who officiates at a number of baptisms, funerals, and weddings every week, I have to say that the people I

serve do not seem to have negative associations with Christianity. On the contrary, they are heartened to find Christianity can be presented in a non-dogmatic and non-oppressive way. For them it seems to be like meeting a long-lost friend.

As for the debate as to whether we should drop the 'Free Christian' name, I suspect we'll be talking about this for many years to come, still believing that we can revitalise our movement by making such changes and still clinging to the belief that our churches will be full as soon as people hear of us. I pray that they are right as it would relieve us all of a lot of hard work but I suspect that this might be only a tiny part of the answer.

I am convinced that our churches will only grow when we are serious about investing in professional leadership for our congregations and commit ourselves to creating vibrant and meaningful communities that meet the spiritual needs of people.

The Rev Ant Howe

Kingswood & Warwick

Close Auschwitz down, remember in another way

To the Editor:

I write in response to Vernon Marshall's article regarding his visit to Auschwitz.

Although the Holocaust must never be forgotten, I find it difficult to comprehend that the 'horror camps' at Auschwitz are still standing. To read about a huge building filled with human hair; I found sickening. These camps remain as nothing less than a 'shrine to evil'. It is 64 years since these camps were liberated and surely we must move on?

Wouldn't it be better to destroy these camps and replace them with a special garden of remembrance; a place where visitors can continue to pay their respects?

It's an unfortunate fact of life that man's inhumanity to man and the politics of prejudice and hate still continue. Just over 10 years ago we had the 'ethnic cleansing' of Kosovo.

Sue Davidson

Abergwili, Carmarthen

Brian Packer retires in Devon

By Christine Avery

The Rev Brian Packer retired on 8 September, after 40 years of Unitarian ministry. Since 2001 he has been minister to the South Devon Unitarian Ministry, and in July, in the depths of rural Devon, members from all these churches met for a garden party kindly hosted by the SDUM Treasurer, Janet Withers. A presentation was made to Brian.

As the largest South Devon congregation, Plymouth has enjoyed the major share of Brian's time, and we turned out in force for his last service on 16 August. The service was followed by a convivial 'faith lunch', with an appreciative speech from the chair of the management committee and the recital of adulatory poems by two church members.

During Brian's eight years we have benefited from a consistently high standard of services, always well-argued and well-researched. Brian inclines to the 'Sea of Faith' end of the theological spectrum and has a strong sympathy with 'green' spirituality, rejoicing in being a human animal in a wonderful universe and not feeling the necessity of a transcendent dimension. However, the sense of the numinous has been conveyed by many of the wide range of prayers and readings in his services, especially the poems which stood out like jewels against the sober background of reasoned argument. His 'in-the-round' services were a successful innovation, involving our (fortunately articulate) congregation in personal contributions on varied themes.

Brian has also been a highly valued member of the church Poetry Group, where his resonant voice and sensitive understanding of the poems were both great assets.

Highlights of his ministry over the years include: a weekend 'retreat' for church members at Shaldon, organised in partnership with his wife the Rev Kathy Packer; the in-depth research into the history of the Plymouth church building, resulting in the publication of the booklet *From Chapel to Church, 2008*, the year of our building's 50th anniversary; and various half-day or evening courses including one on religion and science. In addition, a number of people have benefited from Brian's low-key, kindly and non-judgemental pastoral care. The poem below by Richard Lovis sums up many of our feelings about Brian:

Brian, we feel blue!
With your flowing silver hair,
And your outfits debonair,
-We shall all miss you!
Brian, know this to be true:
With your love of things historical,
And your gift for the rhetorical,
-We shall all miss you!
Brian, praise is due
For your studious frame of mind
And music of the modern kind,
-We shall all miss you!
Brian, your charm grew:
With your gentle sense of fun,
And your care for everyone,
-We shall all miss you!
So Brian, join the few:
Those pastors to our congregation
Who've merited congratulation,
-And we hope you'll miss *us* too!



The Rev Brian Packer cuts his retirement-party cake. In a recent 'Minister's Letter', Brian shared these thoughts:

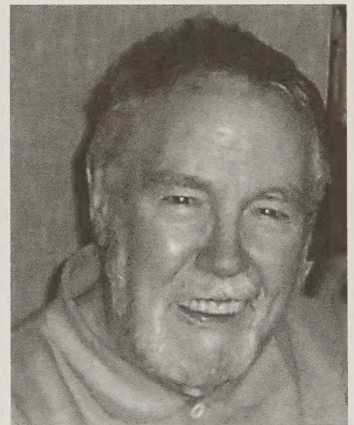
We are not alone. We are nourished by many. The web site facility and the new hymn book represent a great deal of voluntary work for the benefit of British Unitarians. Many dedicated people throughout the denomination have given their time and skills to the Executive Committee, the various panels and commissions, and to maintaining the societies and district associations that enrich and support our denominational life. The Unitarian Church Music Society, to cite the contribution of just one society, has created two CD's that enable congregations without an organist or pianist to play 50 hymns from the new hymn book on audio equipment. The annual General Assembly meetings provide an opportunity to recognise just how much we owe to the many people, few of whom we may know personally, who help to keep our denomination alive.

Edinburgh loses John Simon

John Simon 1936 - 2009

It is with extreme sadness that we record the death, on 12 September, of John Simon. A Service of Thanksgiving, with the Revs Maud Robinson and Andrew Hill officiating, was held in St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh, on 22 September.

In several capacities, John served St Mark's and Unitarianism for over 30 years. He was always at the disposal of St Mark's,



John Simon photo by Audrey Simon

whenever help or guidance were needed. He was a man of many parts; serving as chairman and treasurer; and latterly he was our very able church officer. Nationally, he was well-known in the 1980s for his membership of the General Assembly's Development Commission and of the Information Department Committee.

He is irreplaceable, both in the life and affairs of the church and in our hearts. At this time, our thoughts are with Audrey and the family.

— Jane Aaronson

News in brief

Altrincham on the market



Altrincham congregation enjoyed a great Saturday in September when they had a stall on their local market. The sun shone and customers gathered round to buy homemade cakes, jams, marmalades, pickles and chutneys, as well as books, tapes and bric-a-brac. Good fun, good publicity and a few hundred pounds in the coffers.

— Celia Midgley

Railway exhibition at Padiham

Nazareth Unitarian Chapel, Padiham, plans a Model Railway Exhibition on 24 October, 10 am to 4 pm. This now-annual exhibition will be bigger than last year, in that all three schoolrooms will be in use.

The Hameldon Room will have a full display of 'G' Gauge and a display of Stobart material. There will again be a 16mm which will be powered by lead-acid batteries and a 00 large model tramway layout. The highlight will be the ever-growing Gauge 1 society with their live steam engines, radio controlled, plus many others.

A day for young ... and not so young not to miss! Admission is £3, children £1.50.

Further details from Barry Brown on 01282 773336

Britain's only Unitarian school celebrates
Channing School, Highgate, London, was founded in 1885, and is publishing 'A Chronicle of 125 Years' to tell the story of this successful independent girls' school. The book, launched this month, will mark the beginning of a series of special events to be held throughout the academic year.

The 'Chronicle of 125 Years' describes the growth of the school, from 35 girls in 1885 to 605 girls in 2009. It brings to light an extensive archive of the school's past, including Old Girls' memories of school life in both World Wars and of their many exceptional teachers. Catherine Budgett-Meakin (School Governor and Chairman of the Old Girls' Association) 'hopes this book will inform, entertain and remind its readers of the special school that Channing is now and always has been'.

The founders of the school, Misses Emily and Matilda Sharpe, took the name of Dr William Ellery Channing for their foundation. William Channing was one of the leaders of the Unitarian movement in the United States, and it is the beliefs and ideals of the Unitarian movement that have given the school its unique character.

Channing Head teacher Barbara Elliott writes in the introduction to the Chronicle: 'The Unitarian foundations of the school still hold true: Channing continues to educate the whole individual, with its emphasis on inclusion and respect.'

Unitarians represented at Brighton Pride



Several LDPA Unitarians did Brighton Pride this year. Some – including two members of the Faith & Public Issues Commission – marched with the new Diversity Banner. On the march, Unitarian Universalist Association members from Ohio came out of the pavement crowds to greet them, and many people waved and looked at our banner. The atmosphere (and the costumes of some marchers!) was incredible. Other Unitarian volunteers had a stall in the Community Section of the Park. Here we found ourselves between Amnesty International and Stonewall. Some really good conversations were had with interested people.

Brighton Pride attracts visitors from near and far and we told many where their nearest Unitarian congregation is. Hundreds of an updated 'Where We Stand' leaflets were given out. Those staffing the stall practised their lift speeches on enquirers who hadn't heard of the Unitarians. Several people visiting the stall spoke of having been excommunicated from other religions. One woman had a particularly bad experience on an ALPHA course. Still the interest in spirituality was there, and we hope these people will find a warm welcome if they visit one of our churches in days to come.

In general a good time was had just being together and getting to know one another better! Sadly the weather disappointed towards the later part of the day, but not enough to dampen our spirits.

— Andie Camper